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Sustainable Development Week

[1](#)1. (U) Heir to the throne Prince Philippe of Belgium opened Belgium's second "Sustainable Development Week" in October with a visit to a leading supermarket chain warehouse. The site features a hydrogen-powered freight elevator, 8,000 square meters of solar panels on the roof for electricity, and rooftops planted with grass to diminish summer heat absorption and air conditioning bills. Belgium is a country with practically no natural energy resources, which led Prince Philippe to make promotion of energy efficiency a focus in his duties. Sustainable Development Week tries to sensitize Belgians to the importance of conserving energy and natural resources, and featured 300 companies holding open house to show their efforts at conservation. Recycling was also on display: the Federation of Distribution Companies claims that 90 percent of household packaging in Belgium is sorted and recycled, saving a total of 100 million euros annually. Collection and recycling of toy and appliance batteries in Belgium is reportedly 60 percent, far above the 25 percent EU target set for 2012.

NIKE Expands, Gets Green Approval Seal

[2](#)2. (U) During the Sustainable Development week, America's Nike sports equipment company got kudos in the Belgian press for having a 100 percent "green" business. Nike's European distribution center in Laakdal, Flanders, supplies its own electricity from six wind turbines that generate 20 gigawatts of energy per year without producing greenhouse gases. To further diminish its contribution to pollution, the company uses river transport for 96 percent of its deliveries.

[3](#)3. (U) Capitalizing on its success in Belgium, Nike is expanding its European Distribution Center. Taking advantage of a Flanders regional investor incentive program, Nike submitted an application to the Flemish Ministry of Economy for assistance in constructing its new facilities. The Ambassador helped bring the application to Flanders Economy Minister Moerman's attention, and Nike recently learned it will get 6 million euros in assistance for the project -

about 12 percent of its investment costs.

GDP Growth Exceeds Forecast

14. (U) Data from the Belgian National Bank (central bank) released October 25 said the Belgian GDP grew 0.6 percent in the third quarter of FY2007, or 3 percent at an annual rate. This exceeded expectations of 2.7 percent. Earlier in the year, Belgian growth estimates had been revised downward on fears of the impact from high energy prices, a rise in the German VAT tax rate, and slowing global growth. The new data, along with a rising business confidence indicator (IFO) in Germany (one of Belgium's leading trading partners), may lead to reassessment of the 2007 growth forecast.

Belgian "Peace Corps" Volunteers Chosen

15. (U) The first group of Belgian volunteers has been selected for a new Peace Corps-type program (Ref B) that will send them to 11 of Belgium's 18 assistance partner countries for a minimum one year service commitment. From a pool of 405 candidates, 33 made the cut. The group, which includes 22 French speakers and 11 Dutch speakers, will leave Brussels at the beginning of November for the following destinations: Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda, Senegal, Niger, Mali, South Africa, Tanzania, Ecuador, Viet Nam, and Peru. The program is an initiative of Belgium's Ministry of Cooperation and Development. The aim is that each year 50-100 Belgians (or other Europeans) will be trained and sent into the field to offer assistance with education, infrastructure, sanitation and other needs.

World's Biggest Diamond Sold in Antwerp

16. (U) The world's biggest diamond find this century - and the 15th biggest of all time - was sold last week in Antwerp for 9.81 million euros (12 million US\$) to the South African Diamond Corporation (Safdico). The uncut gemstone, called the Lesotho Promise, weighs 603 carats and is the biggest find in Lesotho since 1967. It will be cut in Antwerp, "the only city with the know-how to work such a stone," according to Safdico. It is expected to eventually fetch about 20 million euros. Ninety percent of the world's diamonds transit Antwerp, the biggest market for cut and uncut stones.

Northwest: New Brussels-Detroit Flight

17. (U) Northwest Airlines has announced it will inaugurate a Brussels-to-Detroit flight on May 7, 2007. Initially five flights per week, the flight will become daily on June 15, according to plans, and use Boeing 757 extended range aircraft. This is the first direct air link with Brussels for Michigan; existing destinations operated by US carriers are New York, Washington, Newark, Atlanta, and Chicago. Brussels Airport Company CEO Van Assche noted that the high occupancy rate of existing flights to and from Brussels has stimulated the demand for new destinations in the US.

By Their Snacks You Shall Know Them...

18. (U) A food habits survey revealed that Belgian snack preferences differ from those of Americans. While Americans favor potato chips, corn chips, pretzels and salty snacks, only 8 percent of Belgians choose chips. While 40 percent of Belgian say they snack two or three times each day, 31 percent of Belgians claim they choose fresh fruit. Less surprising is the most favored Belgian nibble: chocolate bars and candy together comprise 40 percent of snack food chosen, followed by cereal bars, salty crackers, and cold cuts. The fact that Belgium's famous "frites" (known elsewhere as french fries) aren't in the list reflects the fact that they are widely consumed at mealtimes, rather than between meals.

Rime of the Ancient Drug Dealers

19. (U) Two 73-year-old Belgian grandparents were found guilty of dealing in heroin, cocaine and ecstasy from their apartment in Aalst, a Flemish city west of Brussels. Apparently, the pensioners had taken over the business from their jailed grandson. The couple, who had no previous criminal record, were each fined 1,000 euros and given two-year suspended sentences.

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